

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The office action of March 12, 2004 has been carefully reviewed and these remarks are responsive thereto. Reconsideration and allowance of the instant application are respectfully requested. Claims 10, 11 and 13-16 remain pending in this application. Claims 9, 12, 17 and 22-24 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer to expedite prosecution. Claims 18-21 and 25-31 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer as being drawn to non-elected inventions. Applicants affirm in writing the oral election of Group I, claims 9-17 and 22-24 made by the undersigned in a telephone conference with the Examiner on March 2, 2004.

Preliminarily, applicants note with appreciation the indication that the application contains allowable subject matter. Specifically, claims 13, 14 and 16 have been objected to for being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if amended to incorporate all the features of their ultimate base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants have rewritten claims 13 and 16 in independent form. Thus, independent claims 13 and 16 and claim 14, which depends from claim 13 are in allowable form.

Claims 12, 16 and 17 have been amended to improve their clarity and to correct minor informalities.

Claims 22-24 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. As these claims have been canceled this rejection is now moot.

Claims 9-12, 15, 17 and 22-24 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. patent no. 6,687,878 to Eintracht et al. ("Eintracht"). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection. Nonetheless, to expedite prosecution applicants have canceled claims 9, 12, 17 and 22-24. Applicants intend to pursue the subject matter of canceled claims 9, 12, 17 and 22-24 in a continuation application. Also, applicants have amended claims 10, 11 and 15 to depend from allowable claim 13. Thus, claims 10, 11 and 15 are patentably distinct over the art of record for the same reasons as their base claim and further in view of the novel and non-obvious features recited therein.

Appln. No.: 09/521,022
Amendment dated May 4, 2004
Reply to Office Action of March 12, 2004

CONCLUSION

It is believed that no fee is required for this submission. If any fees are required or if an overpayment is made, the Commissioner is authorized to debit or credit our Deposit Account No. 19-0733, accordingly.

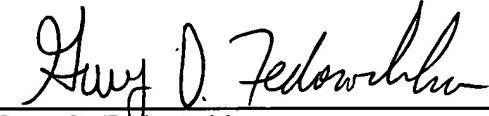
All rejections having been addressed, applicants respectfully submit that the instant application is in condition for allowance, and respectfully solicit prompt notification of the same.

Respectfully submitted,

BANNER & WITCOFF, LTD.

Dated: May 4, 2004

By:



Gary D. Fedorochko
Registration No. 35,509

1001 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001-4597
Tel: (202) 824-3000
Fax: (202) 824-3001

GDF:lab